

# Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

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Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 11

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March 2019

## Editor Introduction, Part II: Let the Youth Speak

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### Recommended Citation

McDaniel, Breanna (2019) "Editor Introduction, Part II: Let the Youth Speak," *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.  
Available at: <https://sophia.stkate.edu/rdyl/vol1/iss2/11>

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When my mother told me she was going through my old knickknacks, journals, books and toys, I tried to curate a list of things that I hoped she wouldn't get rid of before I could return and intervene. My mind moved to an item that I hoped would still be present when I returned home to sift through my memories: a clear, plastic backpack that I carried through middle school.

On April 20, 1999, two White, male terrorists in Littleton, Colorado entered Columbine High School, placed bombs throughout the building and parking lot, and then began to shoot students and staff, taking 13 lives before also killing themselves. The ripple effects of that mass murder supposedly shook the United States to its core. To prevent more such heinous acts from occurring, security measures were put into place at schools all across the country, including my elementary and middle schools. Some of the security measures I remember were restrictions on the types of coats and clothing we could wear, metal detectors scanning our bodies before we entered the gym in the mornings, lockdown drills for the school, random locker checks and, finally, those see-through backpacks.

Many of these measures went away a few years after the shooting, until other incidents on college campuses, at elementary schools, and movie theaters jogged the collective memory of concerned citizens causing them to cry out for more extensive procedures around how guns are accessed in the United States. The backpack that I carried for years after Columbine stands as a tangible, “scriptive thing” that imprints for me, and no doubt others, a measured timeline of inaction on the part of our government and society to demand that the safety of all its citizens be prioritized — particularly the safety of young people, Native people, members of the LGBTQ community, disabled people, and people of color.

In her book *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011), Robin Bernstein details handkerchiefs and dolls as “scriptive things,” items “of material culture that prompts meaningful bodily behavior” (71). Bernstein continues: “The set of prompts that a thing issues is not the same as a performance because individuals commonly resist, revise, or ignore instructions... the set of prompts does not reveal a performance, but it does reveal a script for a performance” (72). My clear, off-brand, plastic backpack showcases scripted emotional responses, performances of care and concern, that were initially embraced and then rejected; it represents a cycle of state-sanctioned murders insincerely addressed by a government committed only to increasing the power of a small percentage of its citizens. What do we do?

Right now, as in the past, civil disobedience and activism serve as opportunities for marginalized people to push back against the political and social structures established to eradicate them. From the self-serving gubernatorial candidate who rigs their state election to the ignorant, uncompassionate tweets that condemn the lawful requests for asylum in the United States, we continuously witness the blatant disregard for life and civil rights that informs the leadership of this country. In response to our call for papers for this issue, we see two things: current trends in youth literature point to young people as the perfect respondents to the regressive movements of this country, and young people themselves understand and embrace that role (Corbett) .

Some recent youth literature, for example Kekla Magoon’s *How It Went Down* (2014) and Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynold’s *All American Boys* (2015), chronicle the movement of youth responses to violence in their communities. As Violet J. Harris reminds us, “Children's

literature serves the important role of mediator between children, cultural knowledge, and socialization by adults... because children's literature has long maintained this traditional role... it possesses both symbolic and real power" (541). These books, emboldened by their role as mediators, don't just privilege youth voices as victims of violence; they empower them as knowledgeable leaders and participants in the movement for change. As Nelson and Dumas suggest, "In many ways, adults determine the boundaries of children's social worlds. Even so, recognizing children as social beings should lead us to shift our scholarly analysis, our politics, and our practice in ways that respond to children's rights and interests" (33). In these books, young people with the initiative and the right support enact and encourage change on levels that exceed the boundaries and limitations we adults set for ourselves and them.

In order to push past these established boundaries, young people at multiple intersections of marginalized identities must be affirmed and encouraged without being represented as the embodiment of all social problems. It is imperative that we recognize the perils to their emotional persons which are now more regularly intertwined with perils to their corporeal bodies. A cycle of false concern from policymakers holds space for them only until the next school shooting. It's time to listen as they define their resistance and hold space for them until their activism achieves justice. These books contain imperfect protagonists and offer no absolute solutions to the violence inflicted on United States citizens by police forces and domestic terrorists. They don't just show cycles; they also show progress and mirrors, or opportunities for young people to activate in accord with the narratives explored in the texts. Meeting young adults where they are, still searching and fighting for resources and justice, these novels explore the necessity of opposing structures that enable violence against Black lives specifically and

marginalized people generally; they help readers assess available modes of struggle and suggest ways to resist state brutality and murder.

In this special section of the issue, student activists and researchers, through personal reflection and critical engagement with children's literature, explore their options to respond and push back against the injustices perpetuated by the oppressive system in the United States. In an introduction to *The Day Tajon Got Shot*, a novel by a collective of teenaged authors, I complete a short interview with three of the writers who wrote different characters for *TDTGS*: they speak about their positionality and motivation during a two-year long project that asked them to struggle to the heart of their fears during the nascent years of Black Lives Matter. In her essay, “‘It’s my time to talk’: The Point of Protest in Eric Gansworth’s YA Fiction,” Mandy Suhr-Systma examines the representation of individual and community activism in two of Eric Gansworth’s novels, revealing the myriad ways Native youth further social change in overt and implicit ways.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold and Leah Phillip’s “Adolescent Identities: The Untapped Power Of YA” details the continuing development of ethnic and racial representation in United Kingdom young adult fiction. They detail ongoing efforts to expand the networks of consideration, communication, and activism for YA in the UK, collating and circulating data alongside empirical projects like workshops to engage youth readers in advocating for more stories that reflect the reality of the contemporary United Kingdom. Finally, Shelly Barber shares her personal journey into activating as a leader at her school in her essay, “March for Our Lives: Hope Through Anger.” Barber candidly shares the intersections of her identity and opens up about the process she undertook to overcome her anxieties, step up and raise her voice. This

issue's incredible cover art by Amelia Hare brings together iconic moments from rallies and protests led by young people.

This selection maps spaces of emergent —revolutionary — agency for young selves coming of age in a time of resurgent White nationalism and racist lethality. We see their agency continue to grow in the upturned faces and silence held at the March for Our Lives in 2018. . We see it in books like *The Day Tajon Got Shot*. We see it in the reclaiming of Native narratives through blog posts by the voices at [Indigo's Bookshelf](#). Their resistance is our greatest hope.

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